

NEWS RELEASE



STATE OF ALABAMA
Department of
Industrial Relations
News For Immediate Release
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ALABAMA PIONEERS TELECONFERENCE APPEALS HEARINGS

MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA, July 1, 2005 Employers and unemployed workers who wish to have an appeal hearing on an unemployment compensation benefit claim, may now do so from the convenience of their place of business or home. This year, Alabama became one of only a few states to initiate widespread use of an Internet teleconferencing technique for unemployment insurance appeal hearings.

“Software technology called “Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP)” allows each of the 12 administrative hearing officers in the Alabama Department of Industrial Relations, Hearings and Appeals Division, to conduct teleconference hearings using their personal computer,” says Phyllis Kennedy, Industrial Relations director. “The move from in-person appeals hearings to statewide teleconference hearings will reduce expenses for travel and leased office space, as well as speed up the time frame for handing down decisions.”

Hoyt Russell, Hearings and Appeals Division director, says over the past several months, VOIP was instrumental in Alabama issuing over 96 percent of appeals decisions within 30 days of hearings. The standard set by the U.S. Department of Labor is 60 percent.

Russell says Alabama is the first among eight states in the Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Region III, to introduce VOIP to conduct appeals hearings.

“Regional officials have told us that VOIP is state-of-the-art technology that is the future of unemployment insurance appeals processing,” says Russell. “They consider our appeals operation as a model for our region, and, most likely, a model for the entire nation.”

Russell says he expects about half of the administrative hearing officers to work out of their home, with the first two starting during the first full week in July.

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Industrial Relations is an umbrella organization of State government which administers: the State Employment Service, Unemployment Insurance, Workers' Compensation, and Labor Market Information. Smaller programs also administered include Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation, Mine Safety and Inspection, and Surface Mining of Non-Fuel Minerals. For more information on Industrial Relations, visit the Web site: <http://dir.alabama.gov/>.